

# **5 Memory Boosting Secrets From a Police Sketch Artist**

Benefit from the techniques used by an actual police sketch artist to remember anything.  
from No More Brain Drain

How many times a week do we try to recall a fact that stubbornly eludes us, like where we put the car keys? If only we could push a button and access the information we want! It's not that simple, but you can help yourself remember better with techniques that Natalie Sweet uses with crime witnesses. Sweet is a police composite sketch artist, and every day she helps average people remember enough physical detail to create a meaningful portrait of a criminal suspect. You, too, can benefit from her techniques.

## **Memory Booster #1: Try to relax**

Sweet takes the pressure off by telling the witness that the purpose of a sketch is to come as close as possible to the person in his memory. It is not intended to be perfect, and no one will be arrested based on the sketch alone. If you lost your keys, don't panic! That will only makes things worse.

## **Memory Booster #2: Cast your mind back, picturing any details you remember**

Sweet gives the witness's brain a chance to "warm up" by talking about everything about the day of the crime, except the crime itself. For example, she might ask him to go back in his mind to that day and remember everything that happened before the incident started. Does he remember what he was doing immediately before? What clothes was he wearing? What was the weather like?

Once the witness seems relaxed, Sweet asks him to close his eyes and start describing what he remembers about the environment during the crime. She asks him to look around the room and describe everything he sees, such as what might be hanging on the walls, the type of lighting, and the color of the walls.

Close your eyes and try to remember the last time you had your keys. Were you coming from an appointment? What were you wearing? Was it raining?

## **Memory Booster #3: Pretend you were an onlooker**

Memories of any incident can be blocked by emotions, such as fear or anger. That's why Sweet gets witnesses to picture the scene as an onlooker would. "I take them out of whatever position they were in, victim or witness," says Sweet. "I tell them to think of it as though they were standing outside looking in, as though they were filming what happened, or watching it on TV. It puts them in a different mindset with a different perspective."

If you had your keys when you walked into the house, imagine watching yourself enter the house. Are the keys in your hand? Did you go straight in or did you stop at the mailbox?

## **Memory Booster #4: Be flexible as you try to remember**

Our brains have remarkable abilities to revisit our memories forward, backward, from above, and in freeze-frame. The memories are there and accessible — but sometimes we have to be flexible in how we hunt for them. After the witness describes the scene and what happened, Sweet has him go back again and “rewind” the mind movie to the place where he has the clearest picture of the suspect. When he has the right view, she asks him to freeze-frame it in his mind.

Replay the incident backward and forward until your mind finds a clue that leads to the critical image: where you put your keys.

## **Memory Booster #5: Don't rush yourself. Let the memory come to you**

The process of creating a sketch takes an average of 2 hours. Some take considerably longer. Most of the time, you can't rush memory and expect good results.

You will eventually remember where you put your keys; have patience!